DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 112 487 EA 007 522

TITLE	Teacher Attendance Improvement Program. A Joint Business-Educator Project.
INSTITUTION	Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce, N.J.
PUB DATE	Aug 75
NOTE	23p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS	*Change Strategies; Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; *Guidelines; Labor Economics; Management Systems; *Personnel Policy; Problem Solving; *Teacher Attendance; *Teacher Employment
IDENTIFIERS	*Attendance Improvement Plan; New Jersey

ABSTRACT

This report reviews the experiences of two New Jersey school districts that have initiated Attendance Improvement Plans (AIP) for professional school personnel. It is intended to summarize a 1974 report entitled "Program to Improve Teacher Attendance." The districts that participated in the pilot project were Newark, with approximately 72,000 students, and Ewing Township, with approximately 5,200 students. Each district developed its own policies and procedures for improving staff attendance, based on an analysis of staff absences in the district. During the first two years of AIP implementation, the staff absence rate in Newark dropped from 6.8 percent to 5.5 percent, while the absence rate in Ewing fell from 3.3 percent to 2.2 percent. Some of the steps taken by the two districts are described, and suggestions are offered for superintendents who would like to initiate an AIP in their own district. (JG)

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Teacher Attendance Improvement Program

EA 007 522

A Joint Business-Educator Project
Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce
August 1975

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CONTENTS -

	Page
Background	1
Why should your school district have a plan to improve personnel attendance?	3
What were the results in the two pilot school districts?	6
What procedures were followed in implementing an Attendance Improvement Plan?	10
What steps can a Superintendent take to initiate an Attendance Improvement Plan?	17

BACKGROUND

In July 1974 a report "Program to Improve Teacher Attendance" was prepared by business and educational leaders covering the experiences that two New Jersey school districts had in preparing and implementing an Attendance Improvement Plan. The successful outcomes of these positive pilot projects have been reviewed and favorably received by New Jersey educational leaders.

These educators have requested that a summary and update be prepared of these successful undertakings, one in a 72,000 pupil district the other in a 5200 district, for use by other school superintendents.

This summary highlights the experiences of these two districts as well as other New Jersey districts which have initiated Attendance Improvement Plans. The contents of this report have been reviewed by the two pilot district superintendents. Both enthusiastically concur with its message.

This report acknowledges the leadership of both districts in their work which recognized the problems and causes

of excessive illness absence. Both have made beginning and successful steps to create and implement a program to reduce excessive use of sick leave.

The study team also acknowledges the continued and generous support provided this project by a growing group of New Jersey business and educational leaders.

WHY SHOULD YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT HAVE A PLAN TO IMPROVE PERSONNEL ATTENDANCE ?

There are five answers to this question.

First, the educational problems which excessive illness absence breeds can be reduced. Substitutes seldom provide service equal to or superior to the regular teacher. Absence causes an educationally unsound and unanticipated interruption in the continuity of the educational process. Administrative efforts needed to provide teacher substitutes require a huge expenditure of time to secure the substitute, orient the substitute to school routines, and guide them in their instructional duties. Absence from the class is a poor example to students. Creditability is lost where teachers advocate improved student attendance yet demonstrate otherwise themselves.

Second, absence replacement is expensive and excessive absence is excessively expensive. Where illness rates exceed the 2 - 4% range of the U.S. private sector, excess costs will occur. As rates of absence are reduced a

proportionate reduction in substitute costs occur. These savings become cumulative as the program continues.

Third, success in reducing costs and increasing educational benefits requires a plan using the most modern personnel practices. Implementation of the plan requires skillful management application of these principles.

A fourth reason is the positive psychological benefits that are outcomes of a successful plan. Staff morale is enhanced since the plan was created by the school management team and initiated through their own efforts. Superintendents look good as a result of leading in the creation of a non-punitive positive plan to improve personnel attendance. The plan has a high receptivity resulting from its positive vs. punitive nature.

Lastly, districts having a plan need not fear the intrusion of an absence control plan imposed by outside forces. The adverse outcomes of excessive and chronic illness absence

are news worthy items which have become local issues in the media. Media inspired issues can cause public rather than professional solutions to internal personnel problems.

WHAT WERE THE RESULTS IN THE TWO PILOT SCHOOL DISTRICTS?

There are really two significant findings in both districts:

First, the data studies taken prior to the development of an Attendance Improvement Plan found significant illness patterns. The following conclusions are derived from studying data from the two pilot districts, from other New Jersey school districts, and from private sector illness absence studies.

- Private sector rates of illness absence fall in the 2 - 4% range (days of illness absence divided by days of work X 100).

- A New Jersey School Boards Association urban district study indicated that 66% of districts exceed this 2 - 4% rate.

- Those urban districts that provide illness absence protection beyond the ten day state minimum experienced the highest rates of absence with one exception.

- A five year personnel profile of teacher absence rates grouped by length of service, ethnic origins, residence, retireability and sex show significant differences within all groupings except ethnic.

- The large percentage of teachers - 80% to 90% have rates of illness absence well within the 2 - 4% range.

- A small percentage of teachers - 10% to 20% account for 50% of all illness absence.

- Average teacher absence is comprised of 70% to 80% short term absence (5 days or less). This contrasts with a 20 year private sector study showing that short term absence accounts for only 44% of all illness absence.

- In Newark the highest rate of short term absence occurs in the months of January and April.

. A wide range of illness rates occurred among elementary and secondary school types: i.e., the highest rate of absence was double the lowest rate.

Second, a 19% and 33% reduction of illness absence rates occurred in the first two years following the development and implementation of an Attendance Improvement Plan in the two districts.

. Newark School District professional staff absence in the year 1971-72 was 6.8%. In the next two years, the initial AIP years, absence rates dropped to 5.5% - a rate reduction of 19%.

. Newark substitute teachers replacement costs for illness absence are estimated to be $3.8 million yearly. While there are limitations to this data since there are no state accounting standards, the cost is a gauge of its magnitude and seriousness.

- In Newark all but one high school and one junior high school showed reduced illness rates in the initial AIP year. Elementary school improvements were best seen in the fact that only three rather than seventeen schools had rates exceeding 7%.

- Ewing School District professional staff absence in year 1971 - 72 was 3.3%. The next year's rate was 2.5 and year 1973 - 74 was 2.2%. This is a rate reduction of 33% over the two year period.

- Total Ewing substitute teacher costs were:

1971-72	$69,777
1972-73	$54,218
1973-74	$53,161

- All major groupings (more than 50 teachers) in the Ewing School Districts showed rate reductions when compared with year 1971-72.

WHAT PROCEDURES WERE FOLLOWED IN IMPLEMENTING AN ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN?

1. POLICY -

One of the most important steps taken was the development in one district of a policy for staff attendance:

> "The board recognizes that good attendance is necessary and expected in order to maintain an efficient school system. Therefore, the board encourages its employees to develop satisfactory attendance performance in pursuance of that goal."

2. PRINCIPAL GUIDELINES -

Both district superintendents obtained staff assistance from school principals resulting in a set of district operating procedures to be followed. These covered the responsibilities of the principal and of the various departments of the school; office of the superintendent, personnel office, medical department, legal, and labor relations. Twenty-six statements are included in the "Program to Improve Teacher Attendance Report".

3. CALENDAR -

Both districts have formalized the use of a four-year single sheet calendar record for all employees. Maintenance of this record by each building principal provides valuable information about staff illness absence. Comprehensive analysis of individual absence trends can be readily made. One district uses this as the form for individual appraisal of staff members' attendance and tardiness.

ILLNESS, TARDINESS
SABBATICAL, PERSONAL, AND VACATION RECORD

Name_____ Social Security #_____
School_____ Employee Position_____

Absence Times_____ Days_____ Tardiness_____

1974-75

JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S
.. 1 2 3 4 5 6	.. .. 1 2 3	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	.. .. 1 2 3 4 5	.. .. 1 2	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7 8 9 10 11 12 13	4 5 6 7 8 9 10	8 9 10 11 12 13 14	6 7 8 9 10 11 12	3 4 5 6 7 8 9	8 9 10 11 12 13 14
14 15 16 17 18 19 20	11 12 13 14 15 16 17	15 16 17 18 19 20 21	13 14 15 16 17 18 19	10 11 12 13 14 15 16	15 16 17 18 19 20 21
21 22 23 24 25 26 27	18 19 20 21 22 23 24	22 23 24 25 26 27 28	20 21 22 23 24 25 26	17 18 19 20 21 22 23	22 23 24 25 26 27 28
28 29 30 31	25 26 27 28 29 30 31	29 30	27 28 29 30 31	24 25 26 27 28 29 30	29 30 31 .. ..
.. ..	.. ..	.. ..	.. ..	.. ..	.. ..

JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUNE
S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S
.. .. .. 1 2 3 4	 1	 1	.. .. 1 2 3 4 5	.. .. 1 2 3	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5 6 7 8 9 10 11	2 3 4 5 6 7 8	2 3 4 5 6 7 8	6 7 8 9 10 11 12	4 5 6 7 8 9 10	8 9 10 11 12 13 14
12 13 14 15 16 17 18	9 10 11 12 13 14 15	9 10 11 12 13 14 15	13 14 15 16 17 18 19	11 12 13 14 15 16 17	15 16 17 18 19 20 21
19 20 21 22 23 24 25	16 17 18 19 20 21 22	16 17 18 19 20 21 22	20 21 22 23 24 25 26	18 19 20 21 22 23 24	22 23 24 25 26 27 28
26 27 28 29 30 31 ..	23 24 25 26 27 28 ..	23 24 25 26 27 28 29	27 28 29 30	25 26 27 28 29 30 31	29 30 .. ..
.. ..	.. ..	30 31	.. ..	.. ..	.. ..

Absence Times_____ Days_____ Tardiness_____

1975-76

JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S
.. .. 1 2 3 4 5	.. .. 1 2	.. 1 2 3 4 5 6	.. .. .. 1 2 3 4	 1	.. 1 2 3 4 5 6
6 7 8 9 10 11 12	3 4 5 6 7 8 9	7 8 9 10 11 12 13	5 6 7 8 9 10 11	2 3 4 5 6 7 8	7 8 9 10 11 12 13
13 14 15 16 17 18 19	10 11 12 13 14 15 16	14 15 16 17 18 19 20	12 13 14 15 16 17 18	9 10 11 12 13 14 15	14 15 16 17 18 19 20
20 21 22 23 24 25 26	17 18 19 20 21 22 23	21 22 23 24 25 26 27	19 20 21 22 23 24 25	16 17 18 19 20 21 22	21 22 23 24 25 26 27
27 28 29 30 31	24 25 26 27 28 29 30	28 29 30	26 27 28 29 30 31 ..	23 24 25 26 27 28 29	28 29 30 31 .. .. ..
.. ..	31	.. ..	.. ..	30	.. ..

JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUNE
S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S
.. .. 1 2 3	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	.. 1 2 3 4 5 6	.. .. 1 2 3	 1	.. .. 1 2 3 4 5
4 5 6 7 8 9 10	8 9 10 11 12 13 14	7 8 9 10 11 12 13	4 5 6 7 8 9 10	2 3 4 5 6 7 8	6 7 8 9 10 11 12
11 12 13 14 15 16 17	15 16 17 18 19 20 21	14 15 16 17 18 19 20	11 12 13 14 15 16 17	9 10 11 12 13 14 15	13 14 15 16 17 18 19
18 19 20 21 22 23 24	22 23 24 25 26 27 28	21 22 23 24 25 26 27	18 19 20 21 22 23 24	16 17 18 19 20 21 22	20 21 22 23 24 25 26
25 26 27 28 29 30 31	29	28 29 30 31	25 26 27 28 29 30 ..	23 24 25 26 27 28 29	27 28 29 30 .. .. ..
.. ..	.. ..	.. ..	.. ..	30 31	.. ..

Key: 0 - Illness Absence
// - Tardiness
X - Personal Days
= - Sabbatical Leave
$ - Half Day Illness
# - Vacation
_____Absence Over Five Days

4. DATA COLLECTING -

A. School Attendance Payroll Report -

A multi-purpose payroll and substitute audit form is used in each school in Ewing at the time of payroll preparation to report all staff absence by date, reason and by substitute replacement. A copy of this record is used by the Office of the Superintendent to post the Teacher Monthly Attendance Summary. A time report is used by the Newark Public Schools.

EWING TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Teacher Absence Report

School _____

Teacher _____

Name	Date	Reason	Substitute

_____
Principal

A = Illness, B = School Duties, C = Personal,
D = Death in Family

B. School Monthly Attendance Summary -

A special form was designed to show a monthly school-by-school record of individual teacher absence. Copies are provided by the Office of the Superintendent for each principal. This report is mechanized in Newark.

SCHOOL MONTHLY ATTENDANCE SUMMARY
EWING TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Teacher Monthly Attendance Summary

School _____

Teacher	1973-74		1974-75					Days		
	Times	Days	Sep.	Oct.	...	Aug.	Tot.	"P"	"B"	SL
Name Inci Extended										
Name Inci Extended										

P = Personal, B = Business, SL = Sick Leave Days Remaining

C. District Absence Analysis

The report summarizes percent illness absence by administrative unit. A district monthly and cumulative analysis of incidental (5 days or less), extended (more than 5 days), and total absence are also shown. This report is mechanized in Newark.

DISTRICT ABSENCE ANALYSIS

	Total Monthly Absence					Monthly and Cumulative District Results						
	School				Spl	Mon	Cum	Mon	Cum	Mon	Cum	
	1	2	3	...	Group	Inc	Inc	Ext	Ext	Tot	Tot	
Sep												
Oct												
Nov												
.												
.												
.												
.												
Total												

5. INTERNAL RECOGNITION -

An internal news letter, personal letter, and in-person acknowledgement are used in Ewing to cite the many individual cases of excellent staff attendance.

Districts which do not recognize the many individuals having good attendance records may be seen by those persons as ignoring their excellent records.

Good attendance is recognized as a visible sign of generally good working conditions and high intrinsic teacher motivation.

6. REVIEW OF LABOR CONTRACTS AND BOARD POLICY MANUALS

Both districts adjusted provisions of their labor contracts or board policy manuals which were contrary to the findings of:

Hutchison

-vs-

Board of Education of the Borough of Totowa, 1971

In Brief, this Commissioner decision stated that N.J.R.S. 18A:30-7:

"...may not be embodied as a statement of policy equally applicable as a blanket provision for all members of the staff, but may only be made applicable, after scrutiny by the board of each individual case, as specifically required by the statute".

These adjustments were made in bargaining talks and in consultation with Association leadership.

7. STANDARD MEDICAL CERTIFICATE

Newark developed a standard medical certificate through the cooperative efforts of the Superintendent's staff. This certificate provides the medical director with the necessary medical information for all extended illness cases. Concerns for privacy, legality, and propriety were jointly reviewed by the Attorney and Medical Director.

WHAT STEPS CAN A SUPERINTENDENT TAKE TO INITIATE AN ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN?

<u>There are five first steps that need to be taken by a Superintendent:</u>

First, an analysis of staff absence should be prepared. It is suggested that the School Monthly Attendance Summary be used for this purpose. A single past year and the current year are adequate. As records are gathered and summarized, look for natural management and administrative grouping and absence rates: i.e., individual school, special teacher groupings, tenure and non-tenure, etc. Individual cases which exceed annual days provided should be reviewed.

Preparing this analysis on the School Monthly Attendance Summary assures that basic data gathered can be used for ongoing records.

An analysis of this data should be prepared for use by the administrative staff.

Next a superintendent's staff meeting uses this data as the bench mark to prepare district operating guidelines. Identify the problem, the causes, and the probable steps that can be

taken to reduce excessive illness absence. Prepare a written set of guidelines which will be used to administer the Attendance Improvement Program. Consult with other New Jersey Superintendents who have initiated their own AIP. Refer to "Program to Improve Teacher Attendance" for existing guidelines in pilot districts.

Third, consult with your medical director, attorney, and labor relations specialist for their assistance. Consult with this Chamber study team if you want to draw on the resources of your business community, but are unsure how to proceed.

Next, lay out the timing for implementation. Ask that modern methods be used to regularly gather, summarize, and use this data. Be clear and keep simple the records you as Superintendent need monthly. Insist that existing data collecting systems be used wherever possible. Of course exercise the opportunities to apply the principles of work simplification. Do not destroy any existing individual records procedures. Generally avoid mechanization until you know what your experience will be. Use the summarization on a regular basis at monthly staff meetings.

Last, be the plan's exponent, sell it, and initiate the plan using and insisting that careful managerial control be maintained so that the positive nature of the plan occurs. Advising association teacher leaders of your work is an excellent step to take. This will assure understanding and in most cases support of what you are undertaking.